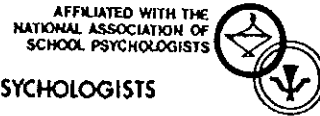




CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS



Written Testimony of

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Education Committee**

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and the distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Jennifer Mitchell Robinson and I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Association of School Psychologists (CASP).

I had the honor of serving as a member of the Taskforce to Study Individualized Education Plans. My testimony today is in regards to Section 8 (G). It states:

"The responsible local and regional board of education shall document in such child's or pupil's record that such board provided the assessments and evaluations used in the determination of eligibility for special education for such child or pupil to the parent, guardian, surrogate parent or pupil at least five school days before the initial planning and placement team meeting for such child or pupil. The parent, guardian, surrogate parent or pupil may waive the requirement that such parent, guardian, surrogate parent or pupil receive such assessments and evaluations at least five school days before the initial planning and placement team meeting by delivering a signed, written waiver to the responsible local or regional board of education."

CASP has concerns regarding how this subsection is written and the effect it would have on school-based professionals working with students on a daily basis. Our concerns are described in more detail below:

- 1) There are already stringent guidelines laid out by the Federal Regulations regarding evaluation and assessment timelines, which the State of Connecticut has taken and made even more stringent. The new regulation set forth by the State of Connecticut state that school systems have 60 calendar days (a change from 45 school days) from the date of referral to hold an initial IEP meeting, determine if an evaluation is needed, conduct the evaluation, and hold the review IEP meeting.
- 2) To enact legislation making the timeline more stringent than the one that already exists puts undue stress and pressure on school personnel who serve a variety of roles within a school system, including providing direct services to students, participating in school-based team meetings, and assisting with Response to Intervention (RTI) models. This

legislation would have a direct, and potentially negative impact on students receiving programming within a public school setting.

- 3) Many of the school staff who complete the evaluation process with children are related services personnel who may only work part-time in a district or who may be assigned to a number of different buildings across a district. These are also professional certifications the State of Connecticut has defined as durational shortage areas (i.e. Comprehensive Special Education K-12, Remedial Reading and Language Arts 1-12, School Psychologist, and Speech and Language Pathology). A shortened timeline and requirement for additional meetings may require more school personnel to be hired by districts to meet the proposed deadlines and to continue to service students who receive special education programming. This could potentially create a financial strain on already struggling school districts.
- 4) Children who are referred for special education programming often require a variety of assessment data, including formalized testing, classroom-based observations, interviews with home caregivers and classroom teachers, and a student interview. Individuals who evaluate students (i.e. special education teachers, school psychologists, speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists) often need to schedule the time they pull students with one another, as well as the classroom teacher to ensure students are not missing large amounts of instructional classroom time during the evaluation process. This is barring that the student is not absent from school, there are no vacations, professional development days, or school closings due to inclement weather.
- 5) As noted above, many of the professionals completing the evaluation process with students have limited availability to evaluate within the confines of a school week. By enacting legislation requiring parents to receive a copy of the evaluation report 5 days prior to the meeting, school personnel have the added pressure placed upon them to complete the testing portion of the evaluation and the written portion within a more condensed timeframe than the state regulations require. We are concerned that a shorter time in which to complete the process will lead more school professionals to use computerized report writing programs and that evaluation reports will become less thoughtful and personalized to the individual student's needs.

Best practices supports that parents should be provided access to the evaluation results prior to an IEP meeting in order to have an understanding of their child's specific needs and to be able to participate in the development of the IEP. School psychologists across Connecticut make contact with families in order to review testing findings prior to PPT meetings. However, we feel it is inappropriate to legislate a specific timeframe in which this should be done which supersedes the already existing mandates laid out by the Federal and State requirements. Therefore, CASP would urge the members of the Education Committee to strike subsection (G).